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House jumps into national monuments fight

By Devin Henry

A House committee is due to consider legislation next week responding to President Trump's order shrinking two national monuments in Utah.

The House Natural Resources Committee will hold a hearing on Thursday to consider Rep. Chris Stewart's (R-Utah) bill to turn the Grand-Staircase Escalante national monument into a national park.

Stewart's bill would turn part of the monument, which Trump formally shrank last Monday, into the Escalante Canyons Park and Preserve. The bill has the support of Rep. Rob Bishop (R-Utah), who chairs the Natural Resources Committee.

"Now that the president has created two new monuments in my congressional district," Curtis said this week, "the time has come for Congress to ensure that these sites are managed the right way."

Trump signed two proclamations in Salt Lake City on Monday, scaling back monument designations made by his predecessors.

Grand Staircase-Escalante, established by President Clinton in 1996, shrank by nearly one-half under Trump's order. He also scaled back President Obama's 1.4-million-acre Bears Ears National Monument to 220,000 acres -- an 84 percent reduction.

The orders were controversial, garnering quick lawsuits from tribes and environmentalists and pushback from the outdoors industry.

But they were broadly supported by conservatives in the West, and especially Utah, where the entire congressional delegation joined Trump for his Monday

announcement.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke said last week that he recommended Trump shrink two other monuments, Gold Butte in Nevada and Oregon and California's Cascade-Siskiyou. But it is not clear when Trump may finalize those recommendations.

The Senate is set to begin moving at least three more Trump administration nominees in the week ahead.

The Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee is scheduled to vote Wednesday on Barry Myers, Trump's nominee to head the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Myers' confirmation hearing last month turned into a discussion of his potential impartiality at the department.

Myers said he and his wife would divest from their family company, AccuWeather, if confirmed to the position, because AccuWeather, a private weather forecasting outfit, and NOAA are often competitors. But Democrats questioned if that was enough, given how many of Myers' relatives still work at the company.

"With your family connections, your brothers at AccuWeather, obviously there is the concern about potential conflicts of interest," Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) said then. "What we need is a NOAA administrator who will do what is the very best for the American people."

Myers pledged he wouldn't discuss government business with his family members.

"I made it clear to my brothers, in fact jokingly I explained to them that we may see each other at Thanksgiving dinner and we can talk about football and family things, but we cannot talk about NOAA," he said.

Myers also said he believes in climate change science, something NOAA helps to oversee.

Elsewhere, senators on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee are due to

vote Tuesday on two nominees: Linda Capuano to be Administrator of the Energy Information Administration and Timothy R. Petty to be an Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water and Science.

The pace of Senate confirmations for the energy and environment sphere has picked up. Last week alone, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) finally swore in its fifth and final member, and the Senate confirmed nominees for the Interior Department and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

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